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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Finally, we're seeing some much better weather up here in the Northeast! The temperatures reached the 60's for a couple of days, and then we cooled down for the rest of the week. I can handle that. Spring is coming (and actually officially here according to the calendar). This change in the weather can only help ease the long winter doldrums that most of us have faced over the past 4-5 months! I'm psyched!

I usually try and focus on topics that relate to the computer technology field - other than my personal ramblings, such as my weather comments. I had planned to discuss technology and how it affected the positive outcome of the Elizabeth Smart abduction; and how technology could do more for this type of thing as mentioned in an article I found for this week's issue. And, as Joe and I have both mentioned numerous times in the past, we both try to do our best to refrain from commentary of a political nature. Well, in today's world, that's not always possible. I'm referring to the conflict in Iraq.

I'll be totally frank - I don't like George "Dubya". However, I admired his handling of the post-9/11 tragedy and his dedication toward an anti-terrorism movement. I do not consider myself a hawk, nor a dove. I certainly do see both sides. And I certainly appreciate both's opinions and their right to them - that is the American way. While I'm not a proponent of war, I can appreciate the need to do something in Iraq. Is it the most serious threat to our security at the moment? No, I have concerns about what's happening in North Korea, and in Israel. With regard to Iraq, I feel that we can have a quick and decisive "victory" there. While I was hoping that the inspection teams would be more successful, I realize that that likelihood was fading fast. We had to do something in Iraq - sooner rather than later.

And the other reason why I'm supporting this conflict is because I feel that our troops, and others', need to be supported. They're there, doing their duty - whether for the right reasons or not. Those in danger in the Middle East need our support regardless of our feelings for this conflict. I still remember the "lessons" that we learned from Vietnam; and I protested that war. However, I did not protest the guys that served, like many did. Our appreciation of the sacrifices that these soldiers are making is something that cannot waiver. Like you, I hope for a quick and safe return of our friends and family who are overseas.

On another sad note, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention something about the recent passing of a member of my old South Shore Atari Group (SSAG). Mitch

Myers was someone I've known since my very early days of being an Atari user. He was an avid 8-bit user who "reluctantly" moved on to the ST line of computers. He was an extremely intelligent guy who was always there to help people. Even after SSAG broke up officially some time ago, he was always there to keep many former members in touch by e-mail and monthly gatherings at a pizza shop or Chinese restaurant. He was one of my most frequent callers to my old Toad Hall BBS for years. I thought it strange that I hadn't received my usual monthly e-mail about a pizza meeting in December or January. Last month I got a call from another former SSAG member, looking for the SSAG e-mail list. He mentioned that Mitch had died a day after a bathroom accident; and that Mitch had been dying from advanced liver cancer, with only a few weeks to live. No one knew. I'll miss his intellect and wit, and his help over the years.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Even though it doesn't really have anything to do with Atari computers, I want to talk a little bit about the SETI@home TEAM ATARI search group this week.

For anyone who doesn't know, SETI@home is a 'distributed computing' project to look for a radio signal from an extraterrestrial intelligence. TEAM ATARI is a group of Atari users who have contributed CPU time for this purpose. We've contributed more than 133 years of CPU time and combed through more than 104,000 'work units'.

It'd be the coolest thing in the world if we could use our Atari computers to do this but alas, it's just not possible. You need a Mac or a PC (or one of a very few other platforms) to do it. Barring the use of an ST, the next-best thing would be for an Atari USER to be the one to find the first definite signal from someone outside of our solar system.

Think of the prestige! Think of the accolades!... Think of the groupies! <grin>

If you're interested in joining up with Team Atari, you can find info about SETI@home in general at:

http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu

and information about Team Atari at:

http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/stats/team/team_21046.html

Well, that's about all I have to say to you this week. Sure, there's lots more I COULD say on several different subjects, but the fact is that you're probably as sick as I am of hearing about it. All I can say is that I hope that the struggles that we're going through are over with

quickly, and that history is kind to all of us.

Now let’s get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Charles Stanley asks for help with a crashing mail program:

"In both Newsie (latest) and MyMail (early) I have been betrayed by an unexpected crash on accessing either Get Mail or Get Selected Mail. I cannot get any emails.

This has never happened before. I have no new alterations to the system or new apps or utilities or patches on my TT030. I have rebooted several times, and even disabled every ACC except Xcontrol.

I have also reviewed my Newsie preferences: all OK, nothing changed.

I’m at my wit’s end. Can anyone suggest what’s wrong and what to do about it, please?"

Edward Baiz tells Charles:

"I have had the same problem and what happened to me was there was something wrong with the email Newsie or Mymail was trying to download. I would run MyMail and get a list of the email on your server. Then delete the first one on the list because it it downloaded first and see if you can get the rest."

Martin Byttebier adds:

"A much better solution: just drop Newsie and use Popwatch/Newswatch in conjunction with Okami. This combo is by far the best one can get for the Atari platform.

With Popwatch one can even detect mails on the server without retrieving then first. Very handy to keep your system free from unwanted mails."

Charles tells Martin:

"Thanks for your advice. Unfortunately, I am afraid to change my set-up, having sampled Okami some years ago and been frightened off the set up. Maybe one day."

Derryck Croker taunts Charles a bit:

"I managed it, so it can’t be /that/ hard.

I still prefer Emailer though!

Lyndon had a useful archive on his web site for setting up Okami BTW, and I also understand that current versions are easier to set up anyway."

Paul Williamson tells Charles:

"If I remember correctly, there can be a problem with Newsie if your mailbox is full. I think you cannot have more than 100 mails in an inbox. Worth a check, and if it’s full, then you can move some to another mailbox, or just delete a few."

James Haslam tells Paul:

"Not true.

In my Inbox with Newsie 0.96a I have over 1200 messages in it!"

Bo Snyder jumps in and adds his thoughts:

"I do NOT profess to be knowledgable about things atari, however years of support for ISP's and a major office product for a company has taught me something about totally unexpected crashes when checking for new mail.

You probably have a corrupt email on the server. What's happening (and i have seen it happen MANY times) is that when the mail program is trying to make sense of the header or whatever, it is expecting one thing, but something totally unexpected comes though and bam, the application crashes."

Charles tells Bo:

"Many thanks for your detailed reply, but, having read all other replies and having a sudden remembrance of the same problem several years ago, I remembered that my first outmail may be corrupted. I examined the same first outmail and, of course, it *was* corrupted. Hence I deleted it.

Result: NEWSie faultlessly gave me my emails this time..."

Dave Glish asks about moving data from ST floppies to CD:

"Does anyone know of a good program for copying Atari disks to CD for use on either a CD enabled Atari or with an Atari emulator on a PC. I have a couple of hundred disks from an old Atari club that I would like to archive to a CD. The disks are all shareware that was originally collected by MilAtari here in Milwaukee.

I recently built an All-In-One Atari in a PC case and added a CDRom drive. It was mainly a project to see if I could do it. The Atari works great.

Any suggestions and links to a good program would be appreciated."

Greg Goodwin tells Dave:

"You can write ISO9660 disks on CDWriter by Anodyne Software, among others. You can keep the data in TOS-ready form or convert them to .ST or similar files for emulation.

Try www.anodynesoftware.com."

Guy Harrison posts this about running MagiC-PC on Wine (a Linux app that allows you to run 'PC' Software... Wine stands for "Wine Is Not an Emulator"):

"This appears to work and chugged along pretty well. Just thought it worth a mention, though I doubt I'm the first to try it!"

Mark Duckworth tells Guy:

"I also got this to work pretty well but I must point out Aranym is a much better idea as it has native *nix support, ethernet, sound, high rez (videl_ video as well as much faster emulation via the JIT."

Chris Lang asks about using a VGA monitor on an ST:

"What would be the best method to connect an ST to a PC VGA Monitor? Possibly a method which allows to use the colour and b/w modes of the ST with a simple switch. Are there any schematics available?"

Greg Goodwin tells Chris:

"Since ST High is mighty close to VGA, it is fairly easy to get ST High on a VGA monitor. If you want color, you will need a scan convertor of some type. Using a STFM or STe's video out to a video -> VGA convertor is probably the simplest way, although you lose some clarity."

Tony Cianfaglione adds:

"Get a Falcon, if you can find one for sale. It can sync to all ST modes (both low/medium colour and high b/w) as well as do S/VGA."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know it's short, but maybe people have other, more weighty matters on their minds these days.

There was a gaggle of posts about SETI@home and TEAM ATARI in the NewsGroup, but I decided not to include them here, since I've already mentioned it. Of course, you're always welcome to check them out on your own. If you decide to join TEAM ATARI, you'll be welcomed with the digital version of open arms. You'll be joining an intimate little group. There are currently just over 60 users in TEAM ATARI.

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Xbox Live' Chat Strategy?
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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'Xbox Live' Chat Goes Both Ways

Imagine sharing a passion for your favorite computer game with a convention center full of people, all intent on beating the bone marrow out of you if you dare to challenge them.

That idea, which is both thrilling and more than a little intimidating, is exactly what online game-playing promises.

The reality is a little different, as I discovered when I hooked into "Xbox Live," Microsoft's online game service that was inaugurated last November.

It would change the way people play games, it said, in part because it uses voice to let players talk to each other. Technically, the system works just fine. It's the people using it who might give you trouble.

Because my Internet service provider is one of the 13 or so set up to accommodate "Xbox Live," getting on line was as simple as plugging my Xbox unit into my cable modem Ethernet jack (the same one I use to plug my PC into the Internet) and loading the software that comes with the $50 "Xbox Live" startup kit.

The glitch: I had to reset my cable modem by unplugging it for one minute. I also had to restart the modem when I reattached my PC. Frequent users of "Xbox Live" will want to get a router, a device that will feed both Xbox and a PC simultaneously.

The start-up kit, which includes a one-year subscription to the service, has a microphone and headphones that plug into an adapter that, in turn, fits into one of the controller's two expansion slots.

The adapter has a volume control as well as a mute button for the microphone. Xbox lets you disguise your voice -- transform it to a robotic monotone, make it deeper and more ominous, or raise the pitch to a childlike level. Some players' voices were so distorted, however, I found it hard to understand what they were saying.

The installation disk includes stripped-down versions of two games: "MotoGP: Online" is a great little motorcycle racing game that allows up to 16 people compete on the same track. (The full $50 version is due out May 20.) The other -- "Whacked!" -- is a $30 cartoon-like fighting game.

About a dozen other games compatible with "Xbox Live" are on the market or will soon be released. Microsoft is promising "up to" 50 titles on the shelves by Christmas.

The promos for "Xbox Live" show lots of friendly banter and trash talk. The real-life experience can be very different.

While playing "MotoGP," I could only hear one side of some conversations, which was annoying. With a large group of players, it's hard to tell who's talking. At the same time, people were eerily quiet during the races. A lot of the younger voices tried to engage people in chatter, but most of the older-sounding players didn't say much, presumably because they were concentrating on winning the race. The experience is probably much different in team games, where cross-communication is important in developing strategy.

For one-on-one games, the ability to talk to your opponent is not necessarily a good thing. When I first went online with "Capcom vs. SNK 2 EO," a $40 martial arts combat game, I began to randomly select cartoon characters for my team. When I tried to establish contact with my human

opponent, the first words I heard were: "You picked Kyo. He’s gay. And so are you."

I decided to look for a different opponent, using "Xbox Live’s" OptiMatch feature. To my surprise, I found that only about a half dozen people seemed to be making themselves available for a match, even on an expanded worldwide search.

In other games, the behavior of some players was so puerile it made me want to unplug my headset. Many of their online comments cannot be repeated here. It does explain, however, why Microsoft says "Xbox Live" is for adults. There are some truly obnoxious people on this network, just like in many Internet chat rooms where anonymity seems to encourage being crass.

To help improve the "Xbox Live" experience, 26-year-old Jay Johnson of Worcester, Mass., has set up a Web site (http://www.Gamertagdatabase.com) for gamers to rate other players. It has a Top 20 list of people who are the most fun to play with, along with a "Hall of Shame" that ranks players based on the number of complaints made about them.

Not surprisingly, the player at the top of the "Shame" list has an unprintable nickname. In second place is a self-described 24-year-old Ontario guy who, his critics say, racks up wins by leaving in mid-game at the moment he gets ahead.

Sudden departures from the games can be a problem.

In "MotoGP," players kept dropping out. It wasn’t clear whether they had Internet connection problems or if they bailed because they were losing. In those cases, the computer takes over their motorcycles. I found a similar problem with "Capcom vs. SNK." Regrettably, when an opponent leaves, it counts as a loss for both sides, so avid gamers won’t want to go up against people who disappear on them.

Ultimately, "Xbox Live" is a lot like life. The trick to enjoying it is to find people you like, get them on your "friends" list, and focus on spending time with them.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

High Tech Versus Crimes Against Children

Are businesses doing everything possible to crack down on people who threaten children?

Last week’s rescue of 15-year-old Elizabeth Smart in Utah after a nine-month abduction was an all-too-rare victory in the category of offenses known as crimes against children, which includes kidnappings,

sexual abuse, and child pornography. Increasingly, technology is being brought to bear on the problem, helping child-protection organizations and law-enforcement agencies respond faster and with greater success. But experts say more can be done to root out pedophiles and other child offenders, and that businesses have a role in the process.

"There's no reason to believe this problem will go away," says Kasey Watson, director of global corporate relations at Visa International Inc., which has taken aggressive steps to stop of the use of its credit cards on Web sites that distribute child pornography. "We want to do more than protect the Visa brand. We want to move beyond the payment structure and not only put these [child pornographers] out of business, but work with law enforcement to put them behind bars."

The number of incidents reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children last year jumped 76%, to more than 43,000. Of those, more than 37,000 related to the possession, creation, or distribution of child pornography.

Too often, the people on the receiving end of the illicit content are employees using business computers. One in every 500 PCs audited by his company shows evidence of child pornography, says Mike Reagan, senior VP of Vericept Corp., which makes a TCP/IP-monitoring appliance. The device is capable of tracing the telltale signs of child pornography--a search for the term "young girls," for example--back to the PC that generated the search, then delving into system memory for illegal images.

"It's scary," Reagan says. "We find that virtually every one of our customers is unaware of this problem until we conduct an audit." (Initial one-week audits are free.) Many companies use URL-filtering software to block access to sexually explicit sites, but they're not foolproof. "It's like using a screen door on a submarine," Reagan says of the filtering software.

Behind Visa's effort is search technology from Webgravity Ltd. that scours the Web for sites that contain Visa's logo and any signs of child pornography. The work is done under the guidance of InteCap, a consulting firm specializing in intellectual-property matters that's been commissioned by Visa. Any evidence of child pornography is reported by InteCap to Visa and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which shares relevant information with the FBI.

But not all businesses are so proactive. "Companies know it's out there, but they're afraid to deal with it because they don't know how," says Jeremy Wunsch, president of Lucidata LLC, a computer forensic company that works with Vericept to monitor company communications for unwanted content.

Lucidata has developed a procedure to follow when child pornography is found on workplace computers. It involves notifying the company, making a copy of the material that's provided to law enforcement, and turning over the system itself if requested. If not, all traces of the material are wiped clean. Wunsch has a clause in his contract stipulating that he will contact law enforcement if he comes across images he suspects are child pornography. "It's the only clause in my confidentiality agreement," he says.

Other tools that can help businesses clear any child pornography from internal systems include intrusion-detection and asset-management software, says Ian Hameroff, a business-security strategist at Computer Associates. "You can't afford this to be a risk to your business," Hameroff says. "You

need to manage it with policies, and you need to enforce policies with technology."

CA and other technology companies are doing their part to help through contributions to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a nonprofit involved in many initiatives to protect kids, including the push for a nationally coordinated Amber Alert system. The center's headquarters building, built in 1999, is named after CA co-founder and former CEO Charles Wang, who helped fund its construction. In January, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation disclosed a $3 million donation to launch a missing child rapid-response program, called Team Adam, that's run by the center. The program is named after Adam Walsh, the murdered son of the center's co-founders, John and Reve Walsh.

The center's Web site (www.missingkids.com) runs on donated CA software and Sun Microsystems servers. Other IT vendors have pitched in, too. In recent months, Resonate Inc. has donated load-balancing software, and Verity Inc. has contributed search-engine technology, says Peg Flick, the center's director of IT development. "The technology plays a big role for us in fighting child pornography," she says.

But more is needed. Flick says she'd like to have an image-recognition system capable of matching images of child-porn victims as a way to better identify and help them. And Ruben Rodriguez, director of the center's exploited-child unit, thinks the private sector could do more to fund efforts to stop child porn overseas, where much of it originates.

Rodriguez applauds the efforts of Visa to take child-porn sites offline or, at a minimum, revoke their ability to use its card for payment. Another company taking an aggressive stand is America Online. AOL has developed techniques to share information directly with the Center for Missing and Exploited Children and has new and innovative tools in development, Rodriguez says. "They're taking a very proactive approach to this," he adds. AOL did not return calls for comment.

The FBI is working with many companies, Visa and AOL among them, to stem child pornography on the Internet, says LaRae Quy, a special agent in the bureau's San Francisco office. Quy says the number of incidents reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, then passed on to the FBI, is rising, a trend she attributes in part to rising awareness of the center's electronic hot line (www.cybertipline.com).

But there's also a darker explanation for the increase. "We're seeing an increase in this kind of activity," the FBI agent says. All the more reason for businesses and business-technology professionals to step up to the challenge.

U.S. May Use 'E-Bomb' During Iraq War

U.S. forces may use a new "e-bomb" during the expected invasion of Iraq as part of a 21st century blitzkrieg designed to render Saddam Hussein's forces blind, deaf, dumb and incapable of retaliation.

The highly classified bomb creates a brief pulse of microwaves powerful enough to fry computers, blind radar, silence radios, trigger crippling power outages and disable the electronic ignitions in vehicles and aircraft.

"They would be useful against any adversary that is dependent on electronic systems," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute, a think-tank based in Arlington, Va.

In modern warfare, electronics undergird virtually every weapon more sophisticated than a rifle or hand grenade. For that reason, Air Force scientists have worked for decades on a practical way of producing powerful but brief pulses of microwaves that can incapacitate electronic equipment without damaging buildings or harming people.

Officially, the Pentagon does not acknowledge the weapon’s existence. Asked about it at a March 5 Pentagon news conference, Gen. Tommy Franks said: "I can’t talk to you about that because I don’t know anything about it."

However, military analysts say a number of unclassified documents suggest such a device is ready for the battlefield.

"There’s been a lot of discussion behind closed doors in the Pentagon and in the trade press that these things are now being tested," Thompson said.

According to a 2000 report by Air Force Col. Elaine M. Walling, scientists at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico have created microwave sources that generate up to 10 times the amount of energy that Hoover Dam produces in a day.

Such powerful pulses can incapacitate electronic equipment without damaging buildings or harming people, making them an attractive weapon whenever civilian casualties are a concern.

In laboratory tests, microwave pulses can melt silicon chips, pushing their circuits far beyond their capacity to conduct electricity. But on the battlefield, even the most impressive e-bomb’s effects rapidly diminish with distance. Although e-bombs’ capabilities are classified, military analysts believe their range is a few hundred yards at most.

That relatively short range decreases the odds that hospitals, orphanages and other civilian infrastructure will be affected, unless they are directly adjacent to or networked with military targets.

"I think it is almost always more humane to use this compared to a conventional weapon," Thompson said.

The bombs’ effects are also hard to predict, analysts say. The surge of electricity produced by a microwave pulse could go directly to the nearest bank of military supercomputers, or it could just as easily be shunted harmlessly into the ground.

"The effects are hard to focus. The moment the energy is absorbed into wiring or other electrically conductive material you don’t know where it’s going to go," Thompson said.

Those uncertainties and others may prevent e-bombs from playing a major role in the anticipated U.S. offensive against Iraq, said Lt. Col. Piers Wood, a military analyst at the defense policy think-tank globalsecurity.org.

"There will be a few commanders who will see these and get to try them out," Wood said. "We’re not talking about arsenals of these things."

Defense experts are particularly eager to see if e-bombs can reach into deep underground bunkers that could otherwise be neutralized only by tactical nuclear weapons. By shutting off the electricity, a microwave weapon could render a bunker uninhabitable by disabling lighting, security systems, ventilation and computers.

Eventually, Wood said, other nations may acquire high power microwave weapons; American forces, which depend so heavily on technology, would be particularly vulnerable to them. He predicted that soon all military electronics will have to be protected from high power microwaves by metal casings, with sophisticated circuit breakers connected to any incoming wires.

E-Mail Worm Pretends to Have Spy Satellite Images

A new e-mail worm has surfaced that purports to show screensavers of U.S. spy satellite pictures of Iraq or animations that are either patriotic or that mock President Bush, a computer security company warned on Thursday.

The worm, dubbed Ganda-A, spreads by sending itself to e-mail addresses on an infected machine and tries to disable anti-virus and other security software and infect certain files on the hard disk, according to Sophos.

Ganda, which does not appear to be spreading and is rated low risk, sends e-mail in English or Swedish. It is signed by "Uncle Roger in Hornsand, Sweden," who complains in a message about being discriminated against in the Swedish school system, Sophos said.

Subject lines include: "Spy pics," "GO USA!!!!," "G.W Bush animation," and others like "Catlover," and "Disgusting propaganda."

Ganda also sends a message in Swedish to e-mail addresses apparently belonging to Swedish journalists, Sophos said.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, a worm circulated that tricked computer users by pretending to contain images of the World Trade Center attack.

Microsoft Warns Windows Users About Flaw

Microsoft Corp. on Wednesday warned about a serious flaw in almost every version of its popular Windows software that could allow hackers to seize control of a person’s computer when victims read e-mails or visit Web sites.

Microsoft assessed the problem’s urgency as critical, its highest level, and urged customers to download a free repairing patch immediately from its Web site, www.microsoft.com/security.

The company said it was unaware of any reports that hackers already had used the technique to break into computers, but the time between disclosure of a new flaw and such break-ins has become increasingly short.

Russ Cooper, a security expert for TruSecure Corp., based in Herndon, Va., predicted that antivirus software will be updated to protect users who might receive infected e-mails and that Web sites with infected pages would be shut down quickly once they are detected.

"I doubt we will see an attack based on this," Cooper said. "It's pretty unlikely any such exploit attempt will get legs."

The problem involves tricking Windows into processing unsafe code built into a Web page or e-mail message. It was particularly unusual because it affected so many different versions of Windows, from Windows 98 to its latest Windows XP editions.

There was some good news. Microsoft said customers using the newest versions of its e-mail software, Outlook Express 6 and Outlook 2002, were protected from hackers trying to exploit the problem using e-mails.

Older versions of Outlook would also be safe if customers had manually applied another security patch, which Microsoft released in 2000 after the spread of the damaging "ILOVEYOU" virus.

Microsoft said customers could manually adjust settings hidden deep within its Internet Explorer browsing software to prevent Windows from processing the dangerous code. Experts, however, said that was not easy to do for many users and that it would cripple convenient functions for many popular Web sites.

Making Senders Pay The Price For Spam

Companies and consumers alike have been looking to two primary aids in the battle to stem the flood of spam. On the practical side, they're turning to a seemingly endless parade of filters and other software products designed to slow the tide of unwanted E-mail by doing things such as checking messages against known spam, using textual clues to glean whether a message is spam, or blocking the IP addresses of known spammers. On the more hopeful side, they're pressuring legislators for federal laws banning spam.

IBM researchers say both approaches miss the target - that the software approach amounts to a constant game of trying to stay one step ahead of spammers, while legislation, if and when it comes, won't be able to address spam coming from outside U.S. borders. As a result, they've come up with another approach: Make spammers pay to send messages. It sounds absurdly simple, and Scott Fahlman, a research staff member at IBM's Watson Research Center, says it is. Fahlman is trying to build momentum behind a concept he's calling the "charity stamp" approach, which would force anyone sending unsolicited messages to pay to reach recipients participating in the program unless they had an authenticated code.

Fahlman has written a basic algorithm that could be used in software that would sit somewhere between the recipient's desktop and the supporting mail server or Internet service provider. It would sniff incoming E-mail and determine first whether a message is part of a recipient-defined whitelist of approved addresses. Those messages not on the list then would be scoured for a 10-digit code obtained from one of two sources - the above-mentioned software, or a "charity stamp" site that would issue authenticated codes for a fee. That fee, says Fahlman, would need to be small enough to be acceptable to legitimate E-mailers but large enough to prove too painful

for spammers. Those messages lacking any authentication would be returned to the sender with a link to the charity stamp site and a statement that a stamp was needed for the message to be accepted.

Fahlman’s vision is for the site to be managed by a nonprofit entity - hence the term charity stamp - thus turning the battle against spam into a potentially powerful fund-raising tool. Once built, the site would let E-mailers set up prepaid accounts and then use those funds to obtain stamps each time they wanted to get an E-mail through to an unknown recipient. Fahlman is trying to gain support within IBM for development of both the software and the Web site needed to get the system off the ground, but he’s prepared to go outside IBM in search of companies that will take on the project. "The whole spam industry depends on spam being free to the sender," Fahlman says. "If we change the social rules of E-mail just a tiny bit, I think the whole problem of spam goes away."

Group Offers Tips on Cutting E-Mail Spam

Sick of spam? Don’t leave your e-mail address lying around where Nigerian colonels and Viagra peddlers can find it, a nonprofit civil-liberties group said Wednesday.

The Center for Democracy and Technology spent six months leaving e-mail addresses on Web sites, online discussion groups and company customer lists with the hopes of attracting the junk e-mail known as "spam" that plagues many Internet users’ inboxes.

The Washington-based nonprofit found that spammers build up customer lists by scouring Web sites with automatic software designed to pick up e-mail addresses.

Sample e-mail addresses left on Web sites attracted 97 percent of the 9,000 spam messages the group received, said CDT analyst Rob Courtney.

Postings to news groups such as alt.health and rec.humor attracted very few spams, CDT found. Addresses given to online retailers like Amazon.com Inc. attracted little spam as well.

Internet users can sidestep much spam by typing their addresses without the "@" symbol -- person at example.com, for example, rather than person@example.com, Courtney said, though spammers will likely catch on if the tactic becomes common.

"You should think about obscuring your address in some way," Courtney said. "Right now that seems to be effective."

The average American got more than 2,200 spam messages last year, according to Jupiter Research.

Why Are You Getting So Much Spam?

Wondering where all those spammers are getting your e-mail address? Likely from public Web sites, according to a six-month experiment conducted by the Center for Democracy and Technology.

But the news isn’t all bad: It’s easy to fool the e-mail harvesting software used by spammers, the CDT found.

The center set up about 250 dummy e-mail addresses, and during the six-month test those addresses received a combined 8842 e-mail messages that the center researchers classified as unsolicited e-mail, which is commonly known as spam. But about 97 percent of that spam - 8609 e-mail messages - was received by six e-mail addresses listed at three Web sites: GetNetWise.org, ConsumerPrivacyGuide.org, and CDT.org.

Usenet newsgroup postings were the second-largest source of spam, but e-mail addresses registered at e-commerce sites, posted to online discussions on Web sites, or listed as the contact for domains in the WHOIS database generated little spam, according to the study released Wednesday, titled "Why am I getting all this spam?"

Addresses on those three sites disguised by simply replacing the @ symbol with "at" or coding the addresses in HTML instead of in regular text received no spam at all during the six months.

And the spam fell off significantly on three addresses that were removed from public view two weeks into the center’s test. For example, an e-mail address listed on GetNetWise.org for the full six months received 6,035 pieces of spam, but an address removed after two weeks received only 894 pieces of spam during the length of the study.

"The shelf life of an e-mail address when it’s pulled off the Web is fairly short," noted Rob Courtney, a policy analyst with CDT.

To test spam from Usenet, CDT used dummy addresses to post to 13 newsgroups, ranging from alt.sex.erotica to alt.kids-talk, and 85 percent of those addresses received spam. But those addresses only received 110 pieces of spam over six months, and disguised e-mail addresses received no spam.

Another piece of good news was that CDT received little spam from 31 top-trafficked e-commerce Web sites, Courtney said. In every case in which CDT registered at a Web site and asked not to receive commercial e-mail, its wishes were respected.

"We certainly found that for the most part, when Web sites did offer privacy policies and choices, that meant something," Courtney said.

CDT also used other dummy addresses to opt in to commercial e-mail and later opt out. At five sites, CDT continued to receive commercial e-mail - a total of 82 pieces - after it gave Web site operators a two-week grace period to shut off the e-mail spigot.

Twenty-six of those 82 spam messages came from Priceline.com, but a spokesperson there said the Web site uses a third-party, "off-the-shelf" opt-out solution that several other companies use. "If it happened to us, it’d strike me that a lot of other companies would have the same problem," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said Priceline.com would examine the CDT study further to understand what happened. "The last thing we want to do is spam people," he said. "Our policy is if somebody wants to opt out, we let them opt out."

CDT received only 15 pieces of spam from posting to discussion forums at

ten Web sites, including Monster.com, EBay.com, and Amazon.com. All 15 came from an e-mail address that was posted to InteliHealth.com. CDT received just one piece of spam from e-mail addresses entered in the WHOIS database.

However, separate from the more than 8,800 pieces of spam generated in the study, a "brute force" attack on a CDT server generated more than 8,500 pieces of spam in the middle of the study.

In a brute force attack, the attacker tries many different letter combinations to try to guess active e-mail addresses. Short e-mail addresses, such as bob@something.com, were more likely to get spam from brute force attacks than longer addresses, the CDT noted.

"Even a user who's really careful about where they give their address would still get spam from attacks like this," Courtney said. "No matter what precautions the user will take, there's still a chance they will get spam."

The CDT study, available at CDT.org (PDF), recommends several actions e-mail users can take to avoid spam:

* Disguise e-mail addresses posted in public places.
* Carefully read privacy policies at sites asking for your e-mail address and look for opt-out choices.
* Use multiple e-mail addresses, including ones for specific purposes such as posting to newsgroups.
* Consider a spam filter if your Internet service provider offers one.

Internet-Gambling Ban Wins Support in Senate

Senate lawmakers said on Tuesday they would try again to outlaw Internet gambling, despite the concerns of some experts, who said U.S. states should instead try to regulate the $4 billion industry.

Top lawmakers on the Senate Banking and Finance Committee said they supported a bill that would require credit-card companies and payment services such as PayPal to block money transfers to Internet gambling sites.

"This legislation represents a measured and appropriate response to a demonstrated social evil that grows worse every day," said Alabama Republican Sen. Richard Shelby, who chairs the committee.

Maryland Sen. Paul Sarbanes, the committee's top Democrat, said he also supported the bill.

A similar bill was approved by a House of Representatives committee last week.

Christiansen Capital Advisors, which tracks the gambling industry, estimates online gambling sites will take in roughly $4 billion this year, half from U.S. residents.

Shelby and other critics say online gambling sites flout local regulations and provide access to children and adults struggling with gambling addiction.

Internet casinos also serve as a cover for money laundering and provide no guaranteed payouts, they say.

"Anybody who gambles over the Internet is probably making a sucker bet," said Arizona Republican Sen. Jon Kyl, who sponsored the bill.

As nearly all of the industry's 1,800 Web sites are based offshore, an outright ban would do little good. Instead, lawmakers seek to prevent gamblers from paying their debts.

Many credit-card issuers, stung by disputed charges, have voluntarily blocked online gambling transactions. Card firms now block roughly four out of five online gambling payments, said Richard Fischer, a lawyer who advises the industry.

But one former state regulator said Kyl's approach would encourage gamblers to use forms of payment that could not be blocked as easily.

Governments would be better off regulating the industry as the United Kingdom has done, said Frank Catania, a former director of the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement.

"It is my hope that members of this committee will recognize that legalization and strict regulation, rather than prohibition, could achieve important policy goals," said Catania, now a gambling-industry consultant.

A bill introduced last week in the House would set up a commission to figure out how best to regulate the industry.

Congress has tried to outlaw Internet gambling for years, but no bill has passed both chambers due to procedural issues and infighting among casinos, dog tracks and horse tracks.

Mac OS X Panther To Be Demoed at WWDC

Apple Computer Inc. on Friday announced the first showing of the next version of Mac OS X, codenamed Panther. Attendees of the company's Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) will be among the first to see Panther in action when the conference opens.

Originally scheduled for May 19-23, 2003 in San Jose, the conference has been moved to the Moscone Center in San Francisco from June 23-27, in order to provide developers with a more complete preview release.

"Our annual Worldwide Developers Conference provides our developers an in-depth look at the future of the Mac platform, and giving everyone a preview release of Panther is the best way to do that," said Ron Okamoto, Apple's vice president of Worldwide Developer Relations. "Moving to June ensures that every developer will leave the event with a copy of Panther in their hands."

The Early Bird registration discount scheduled to end on April 18, 2003 has been extended to May 23, 2003.

The debut of Panther will come just over a year since the current Mac OS X release, Jaguar, made its introduction at the same event. Demoed by Apple CEO Steve Jobs during his keynote address, Apple lauded Jaguar features

like iChat, Rendezvous and Inkwell to attendees.

While Apple didn’t give an official date for the release of Panther, it was just about four months from the date Jaguar made its debut at WWDC until the time it was released. Jaguar sold 100,000 copies during its first weekend, setting a new record for Mac OS sales for a single weekend.

Conference tracks for WWDC 2003 include Enterprise IT; Apple Developer Tools; Application Frameworks; Core OS; Hardware; and Graphics and Imaging. This year will also see QuickTime Live, normally held as a separate show in Beverly Hills, CA, become part of WWDC.

Apple Retiring Original iMac as Sales Slacken

Slowing sales of Apple Computer Inc.’s original iMac computer led it to retire its wildly successful all-in-one computer with a futuristic appearance that reasserted the iconic computer maker’s claim to design leadership.

An Apple spokeswoman said on Wednesday that it was immediately ending production of the original iMac, a gumdrop-shaped computer that came in myriad colors, including Blueberry and "Bondi Blue."

Later versions came in "dalmation" and "flower power" patterns. Apple said it sold more than 6 million of them. The iMac, with a 15-inch screen and no floppy disk drive and initially costing $1,299, was introduced by co-founder and then interim-Chief Executive Steve Jobs in May 1998 to thunderous applause at a news conference near the company’s headquarters in Cupertino, California.

"The iMac allowed Apple to keep its hand in the game and reasserted the company’s leading position in design," said Roger Kay, an analyst at market research firm International Data Corp. "After that, people then expected Apple to introduce astounding products regardless of the category."

Apple has since introduced its iPod digital music player, which was so successful that it designed one that would work with rival technologies, including computers using Intel-compatible processors and Microsoft Corp.’s Windows operating system.

When it was introduced, many compared it to the revamped and reintroduced Volkswagen Beetle and noted the nostalgia that both evoked in consumers. The first iMac harkened back to the original Macintosh, introduced in 1984.

Declining sales of the bulbous machine prompted the decision to end production, as Apple customers embraced the revamped iMac that looks like a lamp-base with a swiveling flat-panel display above it.

Apple is still selling its popular eMac computer, which has the same design as the original iMac, but costs less and is aimed principally at the education market, the spokeswoman said.

Remaining models of the original iMac may still be available at local computer stores or other online stores.

Apple, which has about 2 percent market share of worldwide PC unit shipments, stopped selling the original iMac on its online store on

Tuesday.

"It was a product that had a great run," Kay said. "The number of millions of those things sold, it was quite astounding."

EBay’s Secret Weapon

In the dot-com heyday, nothing said success like a business that became a verb. One day, a friend said, "Don’t send a cheque, just paypal me." PayPal, which began life in 1999 by giving away ten-dollar bills, stormed the market with a simple premise for sending money from buyer to seller that swiftly catapulted it to the front of the online payment ranks. Even mighty eBay was forced to capitulate, spending US$1.5 billion to acquire PayPal last July, a mere five months after buying PayPal competitor Billpoint.

PayPal is the de facto market leader in the person-to-small business payment universe, but change is in the wind. Since the eBay purchase, PayPal has become a revenue unit of the world’s most successful dot-com venture. As such, it may have to raise fees or enter the person-to-person payment service arena in order to protect margins and raise revenues. Having become eBay’s secret weapon in the e-commerce wars, PayPal’s next moves could make or break the auction giant’s franchise.

PayPal’s service was built on viral marketing. Word spread rapidly through the online world that, unlike with competitors BidPay and c2it, sellers - not buyers - paid the PayPal freight. In a nutshell, PayPal lets individuals set up online accounts and add or withdraw money for free, while sellers pay to accommodate those buyers’ credit card payments. By research firm Gartner’s reckoning, PayPal services 27 percent of adult Web users who buy items online, putting it far ahead of Yahoo’s Directpay, Western Union’s BidPay and Citibank’s c2it.

Here is how it works in conjunction with eBay. The auction giant’s sellers sign up for a premiere or business account with PayPal, for which they pay 2.9 percent of the transaction value, plus 30 cents. The figure is slightly lower for high-volume sellers who maintain a rate of $1,000 in PayPal payments per month.

In contrast, other payment services traditionally have charged buyers rather than sellers -- and thus have gained less momentum among e-shoppers. For example, Western Union’s BidPay charges buyers $5 for every $100, plus 2.25 percent for every dollar above that. c2it charges 2 percent per transaction. Both services place limits on the amount a buyer can transact.

Despite PayPal’s popularity, however, the service soon may have to tinker with arrangements that have made it a buyer favorite and a must-have for sellers trying to meet buyers’ demands. After all, as a unit of a larger enterprise, PayPal can no longer think only about signing up new buyers; it also must feed eBay’s bottom line.

Aaron McPherson, research manager for IDC’s Payments Apps Financial Insights unit, said he expects PayPal will have to broaden its offerings to build a more solid revenue base. PayPal fees already make up a substantial portion of eBay’s earnings. They brought in $72.6 million in revenue in the fourth quarter of 2002 -- the first time eBay included PayPal in its reporting -- nearly one-fifth of eBay’s $396 million in net

revenue for the period.

But although PayPal's business is growing nicely -- it could bring in $10 billion in transactions this year -- it is dragging down eBay's rich margins. The auction giant's gross margins dropped from 82 percent in the fourth quarter to 80 percent last quarter.

One way to increase revenues and margins would be to enter the foreign exchange arena, though McPherson noted that competitor c2it is much further along in this area. PayPal began offering payments in euros and British pounds just last fall. In contrast, Citibank allows money to be transferred into local currency in 100 countries for $10, with c2it pocketing the exchange rate. (BidPay also offers foreign exchange, but sellers in foreign countries must be able to cash a Western Union money order, as there is no provision for paying out in local currency.)

Instead of venturing into foreign exchange, McPherson thinks PayPal will start charging individuals to send money to others individuals -- milking the buyer at last, in other words. "The other services, such as Western Union, charge lots of money for this, and eBay can undercut them," he explained. "They've got to move in this direction if they want to move beyond just person-to-business transactions."

Others believe eBay will hike rates for sellers before it imposes any fees on buyers. Avivah Litan, vice president at Gartner, said that without the local offices of Western Union and the enormous foreign exchange operations of Citibank, PayPal cannot succeed in ancillary businesses. "They're spending all their time servicing the eBay market," Litan said of PayPal. "They no longer have the focus and the appetite to go after growth markets like foreign exchange the way they did when they were an independent business."

But how can PayPal raise rates on sellers without angering eBay's star merchants? It is a tricky matter. Litan said eBay cannot hike PayPal fees by more than a couple of percentage points, perhaps to 3.5 or 4 percent at a maximum. Even that might be too much.

"I'd definitely consider looking into some of the other services if they raised it," said Susan Kosor of New York, a premiere member of eBay who pays for every sale through PayPal. Still, she confesses, the high fees charged to buyers by BidPay and others would make it hard for her to demand that customers use those services.

Faced with the choice of annoying sellers or weakening its fiscal bottom line, eBay likely will put off making changes for as long as possible. Sooner or later, though, it will have to decide whether it wants to push the PayPal brand into new markets or keep its blue-chip profits. When that day comes, the eBay community will have to make a decision of its own: whether to keep the faith or look for other options.

French Web Site to Send Bush Pretzels for Peace

U.S. citizens have turned on French fries and toast to vent their frustration at France's anti-war stance on Iraq. Now the French have joined in the food war - with pretzels.

A French Web Site is urging people to send pretzels to the U.S. President,

who fainted and fell off a sofa in January 2002 after gagging on the salty snack.

The Web Site, www.bretzelforbush.com, says the pretzels will be stored at a secret location before being sent to the White House in a historic mass action.

The retaliation follows moves by some in the United States to change the names of French fries and French toast to Freedom fries and Freedom toast.

The pretzels are on sale for seven euros ($7.56) each, with one euro going to a children's charity. So far some 250 euros have been raised for the charity.

"We think that to oppose war is not to be against the American people, but simply against the politics of the Bush administration," the Web Site says.

After the fainting incident, Bush lamented not heeding his mother's advice to chew pretzels before swallowing and his wife Laura joked he was now "practicing safe snacks."

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